

In which El learns about love by hoppingmad

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Characters: Dustin Henderson, Eleven | Jane Hopper, Jim "Chief" Hopper, Joyce Byers, Lucas Sinclair, Mike Wheeler, Will Byers

Relationships: Eleven | Jane Hopper/Mike Wheeler, Joyce Byers/Jim "Chief" Hopper

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Summary:

El is testing the limits of her powers.

El is jealous of Joyce.

Poor Hop.

In which El learns about love

Things are better since she closed the gate. She has more freedom than ever before, though still unable to show her face around Hawkin's. Hopper ensures that they visit the Byer's regularly and while she's there the party is allowed to visit.

It's one of these such evenings when she's in Will's bedroom with Will, Mike, Lucas and Dustin that *it* happens.

Hopper has forbidden her from testing the limits of her powers... but though she is mostly good at following his rules, this is one she has chosen to ignore. The party support her wholeheartedly and though Mike worries about her safety, she knows that if anything goes wrong she is around friends who would move Heaven and Earth to protect her.

She has a blindfold on, and Will's brand-new radio is crackling in the background. She is sitting cross legged beside her friends on the floor, her back resting against the edge of Will's bed and she can hear them all breathing around her, hear their clothing as they shift excitedly. It takes her a while to tune out of the sounds around her and shift into the *in between*.

She wants to see if she can find people close to her first so she finds Mike first and places a hand on either side of his face. She already knows she can hear words people are speaking, but she is testing out a theory that Dustin came up with – what if she can hear their *thoughts* too?

Mike is thinking of her, she knows this and she feels a twinge of excitement. Dustin was right! She *can* hear thoughts. Mike is worried, but he is also happier than he has ever been. He is happy because of *her*, because he has his El back.

She drifts away from Mike and into the kitchen where she finds Joyce and Hopper drinking coffee and smoking. She watches them for a little, they are silent, but every now and again their eyes will shift towards one another. El touches Hopper's shoulder and rather than *hear* his thoughts she can almost *feel* them. It hits her like a tonne of

bricks, and she suddenly feels off-balance, dizzy with the overwhelming *something* that is emanating from his mind.

She doesn't need to hear his exact thoughts to know that this *feeling* he has - is directed at Mrs. Byers and it sends a shiver down her spine. What he feels for Joyce is a hundred times more potent than what Mike feels for her...

She pulls her hand away quickly, eyes wide. She's only been in his mind a fraction of a second, but it was more than enough. She thinks of touching Joyce to see if what Hopper feels about her is reciprocated... but the feeling of light-headedness is not going away so instead she returns to her body and rips of the bandanna tied around her eyes.

"What happened?" The boys all chatter at once and she has to hold up her hands, palms forward to get them to stop. The room is just a spinning blur of colours.

"Give her a minute!" She hears Mike shout, and his hand comes to rest on her shoulder, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

The room finally comes back into focus and she swipes at the blood beneath her nose. She takes a few deep breaths.

"Dustin, you were right." She gives him a smile, and Dustin holds up his fist. Apparently while she was gone the boys had taken to something called "fist bumping". She lifted her own closed fist and bumped it against his with a grin. She turns to Mike, smiling shyly. "Thank you." She says quietly. She sees the blush on Mike's face, but he is smiling too. He knows, without speaking that she heard his thoughts loud and clear. They don't have anything to hide from each other.

She is about to tell them about Hopper when she hears the man himself clomping down the hallway. She quickly scrubs at her nose with the bandana and shoves it under the bed, looking to Mike in askance. One of the others turns the radio off.

"No blood." He whispers quickly.

Hopper knocks on the door but opens it without waiting for a response, he often does which is what makes this testing of her powers so incredibly risky.

“It’s getting dark, time for you to all go home.” He tells the group. “Will, El – dinner is almost ready so come on out to the kitchen.”

El suddenly doesn’t know how to be around him, her arms hang awkwardly at her side. What should she say to him? She and Will say goodbye to their friends on the doorstep but when she is sitting at the kitchen table she finds she can’t stop staring at Hopper. He meant the world to her. But did she mean the world to him? Or did he love Mrs. Byers more than he loved her?

“You are very quiet, El.” Joyce ruffles her hair before placing a steaming plate of shepherd’s pie in front of her. She apologises automatically and Will elbows her in the side, his eyes wide.

“What are you apologising for?” Hopper frowns in her direction.

“Ah,” she can’t think of an excuse.

“We were just going over my homework and it was very tiring.” Will says, but she can tell both Joyce and Hopper don’t believe him.

“Uh huh,” Hopper answers skeptically.

“Well, eat up.” Joyce sits next to Hopper and El suddenly loses her appetite. Though she can’t still *hear* or *feel* how he does, she feels as if her eyes have been opened. Now she can see how much he cares for the woman sitting next to him... just by the way his face changes as they speak, the way his eyes constantly seek out hers – and even the way he sits... his entire demeanor is different around Joyce.

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The drive home is quiet at first. She is still lost in her thoughts, trying to figure out how she feels about everything she has discovered tonight. She can feel Hopper’s eyes burning into the side of her face now and again, but she isn’t sure how to talk about this. Finally, when they are heading down the driveway to the cabin she finds her voice.

“Do you love Mrs. Byers more than me?” She has to grab the sides of her chair because Hopper nearly drives them off the road at her question. She feels her heart skip a beat in fear and automatically she uses her powers to straighten the truck.

“Where did... what do...” he starts, but then focuses back on the road and she sees his brow furrow – that’s his thinking face, she knows this. He’s trying to figure out what to tell her.

“Friends don’t lie.” She reminds him.

“I don’t... *love* Joyce.” He finally answers. They are pulling up near the cabin, but neither of them gets out of the car. “I love you very much, El.” He turns his body to face her, his expression sincere. “more than anyone else.”

“You are lying!” She feels her eyes fill with tears. “I know you love her. I-“ she almost blurted out that she had *felt* it – but instead she hides her face in her hands.

“I care about Joyce, of course I do.” He seems exasperated with her and she feels a sob rise to her throat.

“More than me.” She whispers, then really starts crying.

“No, no!” He pulls her hands away from her face. “Look at me, El.” She raises her eyes to meet his. “I don’t know where this is all coming from. But you mean the world to me.”

She stares into his eyes long and hard, finally finding it within her to believe him. She knew that there were various kinds of love. Just like how she loved her friends, but she also *loved* Mike.

“Does Joyce know?” She asks him. Hopper looks thoroughly confused now.

“Know what?” He asks.

“Don’t be stupid.” She sniffs.

“Let’s go inside, it’s cold.”

She decides to let the conversation drop for now. She can't think of a way to discuss this without incriminating herself...

Author's Note:

I'm leaving this open-ended 'cause I can't decide whether to finish it or not. I'm not great at writing the kids!